

# Developing online tools for increased landholder collaboration in landscape scale conservation and production

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## In a nutshell:

This research is part of a two-year project that aims to develop models and tools for incentivising on-ground collaboration on cross-property conservation and production activities. The focus of the study is the NSW Central Tablelands and Central West, particularly the areas around Mudgee-Rylstone and Cowra-Boorowa. The project involves:

- Social analysis to identify types of activities and organisational structures that foster collaboration
- Spatial analysis to determine how these activities could be linked strategically to deliver landscape-scale impacts outcomes
- The development of an online GIS-based tool for use by landholders and other stakeholders in identifying opportunities for collaboration.

## Rationale:

Cross-property collaboration has the potential to enhance the viability of environmental actions and enterprise options extending beyond individual property boundaries.

Environmental issues such as habitat connectivity, riparian management, soil erosion and weed and pest control could benefit from increased collaboration, while collaborative commercial activities could potentially include ecotourism, agroforestry, biobanking, carbon farming and kangaroo management.

Recent developments around online spatial tools offer enhanced opportunities for collaboration by enabling landholders to connect with one another, to identify landscape-scale opportunities for environmental or commercial collaboration, and to act as a repository of user-generated spatial data including monitoring results and case studies.

## Results from the online tool survey:

- 45 landholders completed the survey (22 at Watershed and 23 at Hovells Creek)
- Generally positive response to the idea of an online tool, despite Internet connectivity challenges
- Lack of reliable internet access is a major barrier for access and adoption of online instruments, and data security is a key priority.
- Leading issues identified for inclusion in the pilot-testing of the tool in 2017 include weed and pest management, landscape-scale revegetation corridors and ecotourism.



## Initial findings:

- Strong interest in a tool with different levels of access, so that monitoring results, photos and other data can be shared either with the general public or with a more select group (e.g. a Landcare group). Data security was highly valued in relation to contact details and anything that can be linked to an individual property.
- Cross-platform compatibility: any tool needs to be able to be used on PCs, phones and tablets, as landholders have differing levels of reliance on these devices.
- Poor internet access: any new online tool needs to account for the prevalence of slow and unreliable internet access for many landholders.
- Fee: Landholders may be willing to pay a fee, but the value of the site would need to be demonstrated first.
- Other ideas : developing new conservation activities, exploring eco-tourism opportunities and implementing novel agro-ecological land management initiatives.



## Methodology:

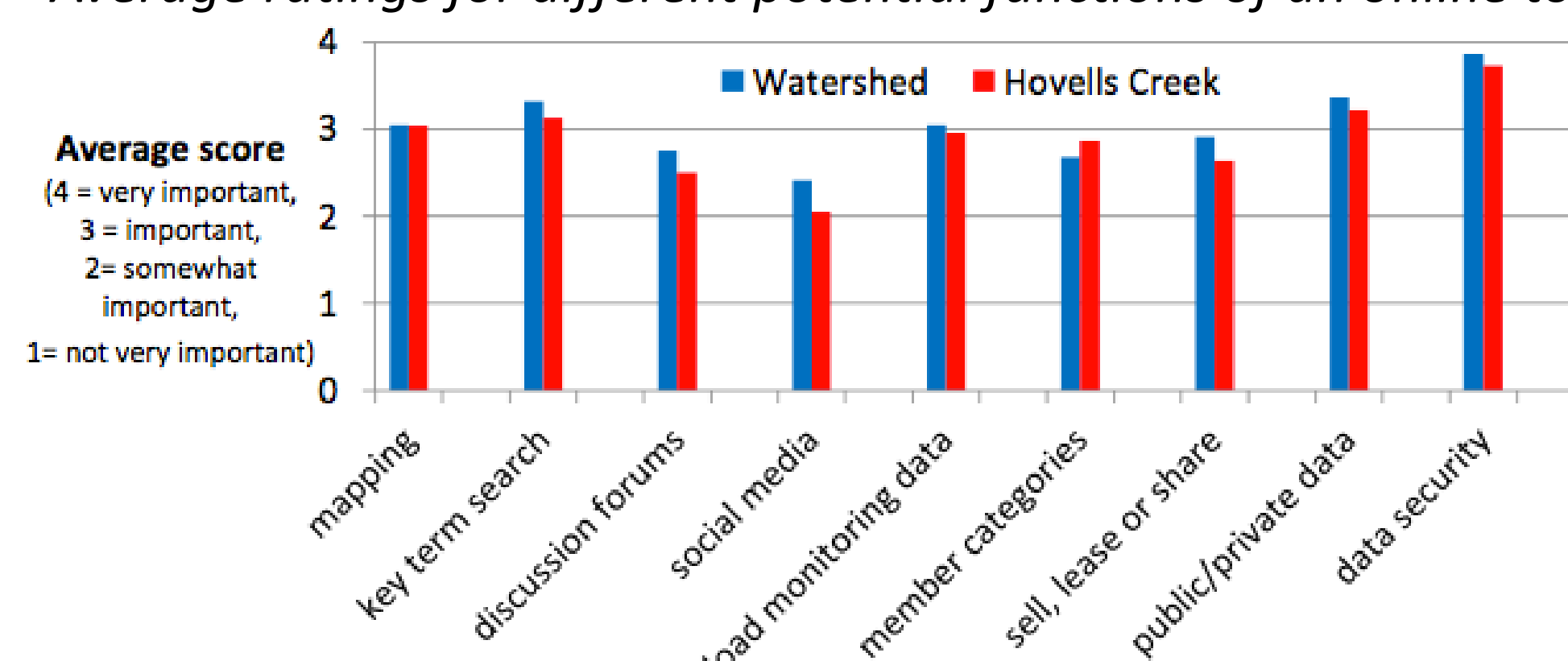
Stage 1  
2016

- Review examples of landholder collaboration, including international and local examples
- Focus groups, interviews, workshops and an online tool survey in pilot areas to identify barriers and opportunities for collaboration => Participatory Rural Appraisal. Focus Groups in Watershed Landcare and Hovells Creek Landcare. A mix of large commercial farmers and smaller non-commercial landholders.
- Research existing online information tools that could adapt to the project needs

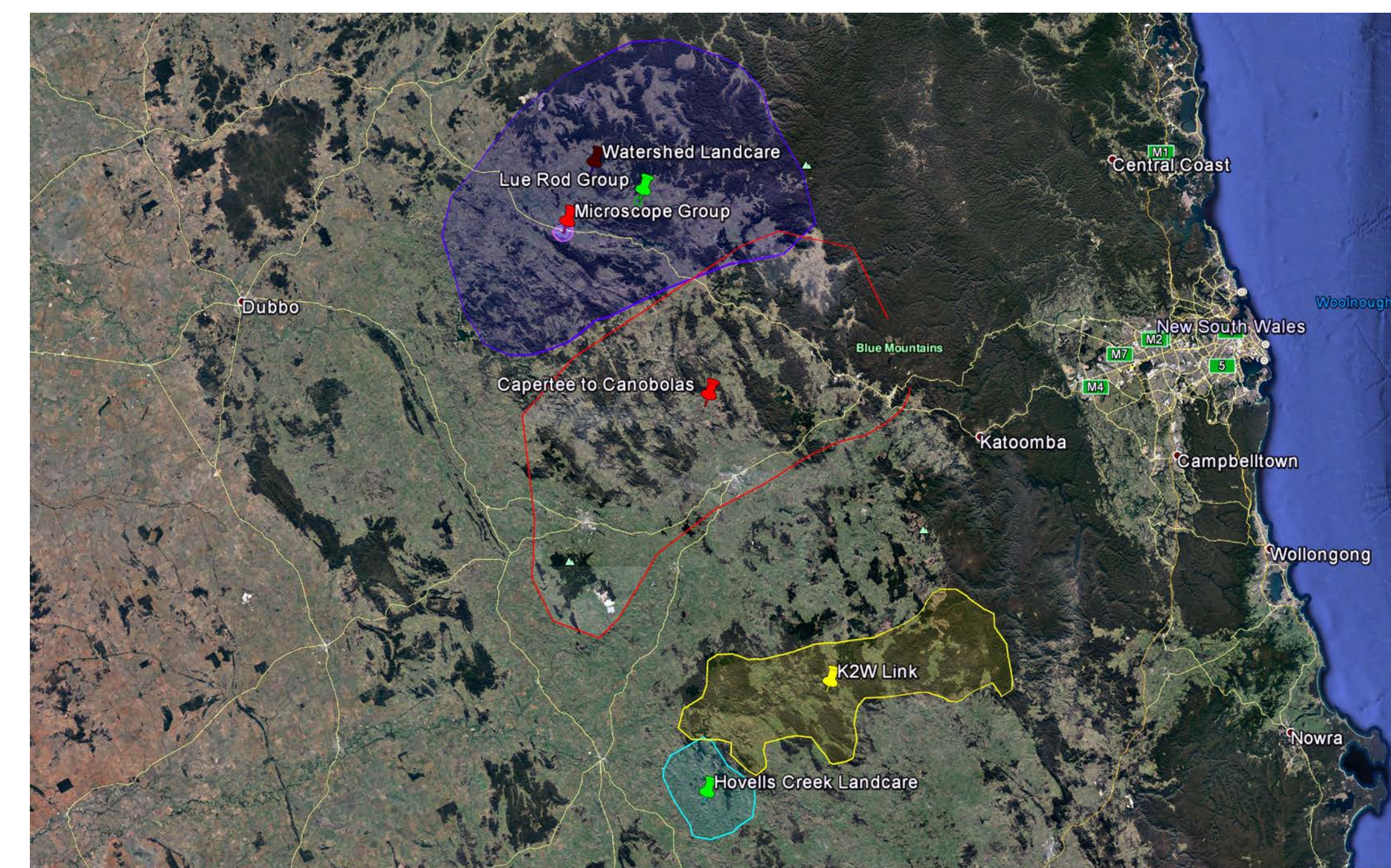
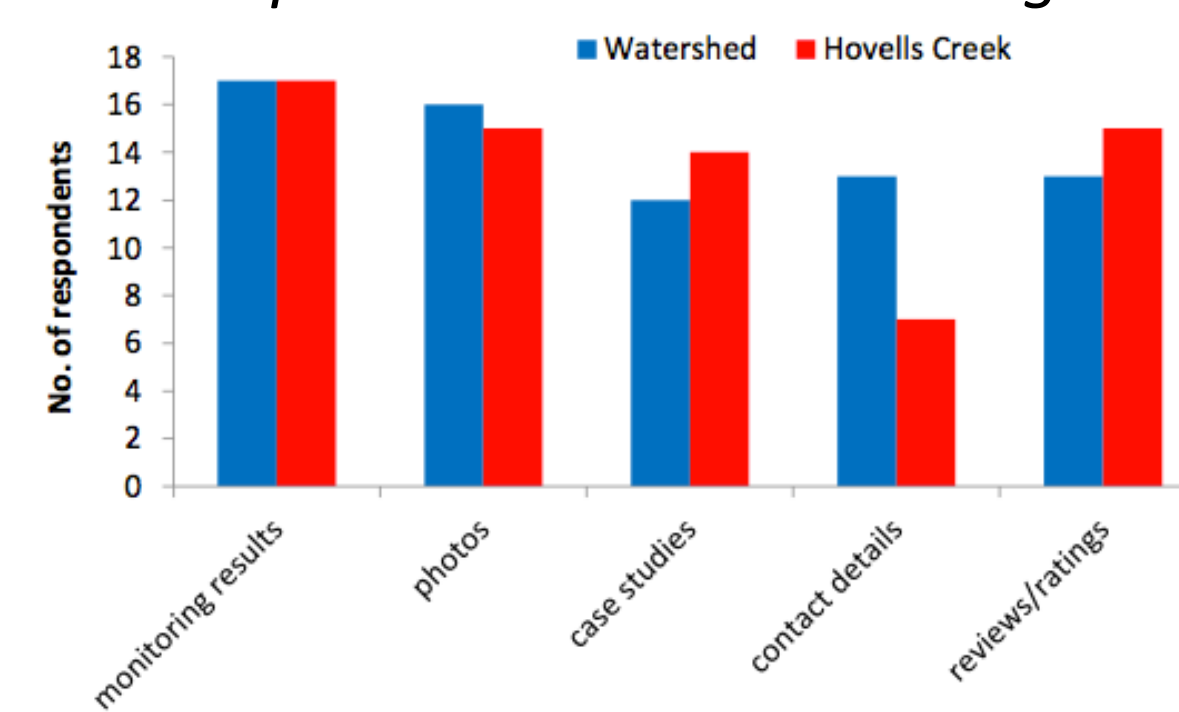
Stage 2  
2017

- Pilot-test enhanced collaboration options through the NSW Landcare Gateway. Gathering baseline data layers on native vegetation, weed and pest prevalence and tourism infrastructure (e.g. roads, towns, rail corridors) from sites such as the NSW data portal, NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, FeralScan, NSW Wildlife Access, The Atlas of Living Australia and Geosciences Australia
- Select one or more collaboration models to explore in depth with an interested group.
- Assess the opportunities and barriers around adoption, and develop policy and legal advice

Average ratings for different potential functions of an online tool



Types of data respondents would be willing to share



Study area: Central Tablelands of NSW

## Next Steps - Pilot Testing the Online Collaboration Tool

Building on the NSW Landcare Gateway platform, new functionalities identified during the surveys are being developed. Three groups and associated initiatives will be used to pilot test the bespoke tool:

- **Capertee group:** landscape scale conservation related to revegetation corridors. Using available data to pilot test the software, its functionalities and to illustrate to the three groups below its functions and capabilities
- **Lue Rd Group:** kangaroo monitoring by farmers; gathering and sharing basic information about kangaroo distributions
- **Watershed Landcare:** work with the Microscope Group mapping spider occurrence as proxy indicator of landscape health.
- **Kanangra Boyd to Wyangala Link (K2W)** including LachLandcare, Hovells Creek Landcare and Neville Landcare: monitoring use of nesting boxes installed for squirrel gliders as part of the Glideways project.

Monitoring tasks for each group (tailored to their current activities and needs) have been devised as part of the pilot testing; thus, assessing user-friendliness, functionality and perceived value of the tool via replicability within a group/collaborative setting.

Pilot testing will include visioning exercises; encouraging users to experiment with the tool and include extra information that they want to map/monitor – for example, local visions for eco-tourism trails, evidence of past conservation initiatives in the landscape, or locations of local cultural heritage preservation works.

**Expectations:** to learn through user feedback how the tool *is* and *can be* used, to determine its attractiveness as a vehicle for locally-based digital communication.



## Partners:

Great Eastern Ranges Initiative; Little River Landcare; Watershed Landcare; Hovells Creek Landcare; Landcare NSW Inc.; Stipa Native Grasses Association; Local Land Services: Central West, Central Tablelands, Greater Sydney